

Leaflet prepared by the Patient Liaison Group of the Royal College of Anaesthetists and the Association of Physicians' Assistants (Anaesthesia)

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If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact:

Local Hospital:

Name: (Name and title of lead anaesthetist)

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Physicians' Assistant (Anaesthesia)

Information for patients



THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF ANAESTHETISTS



Introduction

Traditionally in the UK only doctors who have had specialist training in anaesthesia administer your anaesthetic. The Physicians' Assistant in Anaesthesia [PA(A)] is a health professional introduced in the UK to expand anaesthesia services and to make operating theatres work more efficiently. PA(A)s work as part of the anaesthesia team under the supervision of your consultant anaesthetist.

If you require further information about anaesthesia the leaflets 'You and your anaesthetic' and 'Anaesthesia explained' may help. These are available at www.youranaesthetic.info, or from your anaesthetist or PA(A).

Question 1 – What is a Physicians' Assistant in Anaesthesia?

The PA(A), formerly known as an Anaesthesia Practitioner, is a highly trained and skilled individual who is qualified to administer anaesthesia under the supervision of an anaesthetist (a medically qualified doctor). Those who become PA(A)s are either health professionals or university science graduates who have undergone a twenty-seven month programme of postgraduate training, leading to a Postgraduate Diploma in Anaesthetic Practice. PA(A)s do not have a medical qualification. The full curriculum for the PA(A) training can be found at the Royal College of Anaesthetists' website, details of which are at the end of this leaflet.

Question 2 – How is the Physicians' Assistant (Anaesthesia) involved in my care?

PA(A)s are involved in a number of ways.

- ◆ Carrying out your preoperative assessment for anaesthesia and organising the anaesthesia checks for surgery.
- ◆ Planning your anaesthetic and ensuring it is approved by their supervisor.
- ◆ Ensuring you are properly prepared for surgery.
- ◆ Administering and monitoring your anaesthetic throughout your operation.
- ◆ Assisting your anaesthetist if you have your operation under regional anaesthesia. Regional anaesthesia involves an injection to numb



a larger or deeper part of the body and may be performed with or without sedation.

- ◆ Some Trusts have chosen to employ PA(A)s to support doctors in Accident & Emergency, Emergency Medicine and Critical Care where their advanced skills are of benefit to patients.

Question 3 – Does the involvement of the PA(A) affect the standard of my care?

No, PA(A)s must be competent to care for you before taking any responsibility for your care. Only when their supervising anaesthetist is confident that they have the necessary skills will they take on these responsibilities. The Royal College of Anaesthetists would not support the PA(A) role if it felt that standards of UK anaesthesia would fall below present standards of patient safety. Other countries that already use non-doctors in their teams do not report any differences in the outcome for patients.

Question 4 – How are PA(A)s supervised?

Team working is essential for safe anaesthesia care. Your anaesthetist must always be present during the induction (start) of your anaesthetic and at emergence (bringing your anaesthetic to an end) when your operation is finished. During the time that you are under anaesthesia, the PA(A) will work under supervision from your anaesthetist who will be present in the theatre suite but may not be in your specific operating theatre. In this way, one consultant anaesthetist can oversee the care of two patients. If you are worried about any aspect of your care you can speak to your consultant anaesthetist, who will be able to answer your questions and concerns. Your anaesthetist will want to help you so that you can make the choices that are right for you.

Question 5 – Where can I get more information?

Your local Patient Liaison and Advice Service (PALS) may be able to help. A full range of anaesthesia related information is available on the Royal College of Anaesthetists website at www.youranaesthetic.info. Additional information and links can be found on the Association of Physicians' Assistants (Anaesthesia) at www.anaesthesiateam.com.